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Bureau of Intelligence and Research

Research Memorandum

RSB-3.30, April 10, 1962

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ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS:

APRIL 6 - 11

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations. The text of the Sepp Schwab (GDR Deputy Foreign Minister) interview printed in the Times of India April 4 (and reported in our memorandum last week) reveals Schwab also stated that "there can be no settlement without recognising the sovereign rights of the GDR. This means that at a certain time our consent has to be given to an agreement between the four powers." In a somewhat ambiguous formulation, Schwab furthermore implied the GDR would not insist on veto rights in the Ulbricht-proposed arbitration authority on access but noted that under the proposal the GDR would "be responsible for the conduct of the access routes" as Ulbricht had specified. (He referred to this proposal as only a "first step" and stated that further measures to meet Western objections were "not excluded; nor would the GDR object to this curtailment of its sovereignty.") Schwab also mentioned that the arbitration authority would be composed of members from the four powers and from some neutral states.

ADN reported the interview briefly, giving its title as "Agreement Between East and West Possible" and attributing to the Times of India the conclusion that details of the "latest GDR proposals" were certainly "negotiable." ADN did not, however, report the substance of Schwab's statements or his implication that further GDR concessions might be forthcoming.

Soviet Ambassador to Bonn Smirnov reportedly told SPD journalists he believed a modus vivendi had been reached between Washington and Moscow both on Berlin and on disarmament and that given good faith on both sides, this could lead to a reduction in tensions. Smirnov dismissed references to Ulbricht's access authority proposal with the comment that the Soviets could not prevent the chief of a sovereign state from having opinions on a problem of concern to him. The ambassador predicted some "surprising decisions" (unspecified) of "interest to the Germans" would be forthcoming shortly and also advocated a mere pragmatic basis for East-West relations. Similar views have been conveyed recently to a number of SPD officials by Soviet and other bloc sources. In contrast to Smirnov, however, Soviet commentator Pelyanov, in an April 8 roundtable discussion on the Moscow radio, claimed Walter Lippman's recent assertion that both sides are satisfied with the status quo in Berlin was "quite incorrect."

The GDR Foreign Office has protested FRG efforts to stop UN circulation of the GDR March 26 memorandum on disarmament. The UN Secretariat had begun to distribute copies of the GDR communication, arguing inter alia that its action did not constitute indirect recognition of a "state" but merely accept the existence of a "country."

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Military Preparations and Reconstructions. There have been no official Soviet flights in the Berlin air corridor since the abrupt cessation of all activity March 30, and no Soviet flight plans have been filed at the Berlin Air Safety Center since that date.

The GDR provincial press recently published a commentary reasserting East German legal claims to sovereignty over the air corridors, insisting there was no legal basis for the present civilian air traffic to Berlin. However, the article noted the GDR had thus far not prohibited air corridor traffic because "nothing must be left untried to arrive at a peaceful solution by treaty", and that until then, the GDR "reserves to itself the safeguarding of its sovereign rights in the air."

The UK Ministry for Aviation announced that beginning May 1, British air lines flying to Berlin would be required to file their scheduled flight plans for corridor runs with the Ministry for advance approval.

Berlin and Germany. No changes in access procedures to or within Berlin were reported during the week. The West Berlin fire department was, however, twice prevented from entering the exclave of Steinstuecken to answer emergency calls.

An authoritative East German commentary on the new GDR customs law published April 9 stated that until agreements are reached on the Berlin situation "the movement of goods between West Berlin on the one hand, and the GDR, the FRG and other states on the other, will proceed on the basis of the regulations previously in force." No mention was made of what, if any, effect the new legislation would have on passenger traffic. Article 1 of the law, however, apparently specifies that the "territory of the GDR -- no more, no less -- is one, independent, sovereign customs area. Customs procedure on the territory of our state is thus regulated exclusively by appropriate GDR state authorities." (It should be noted GDR spokesmen have in the past repeatedly asserted West Berlin is located on the "territory of the GDR", even though it was not part of the GDR state.)

The dysentery epidemic in East Germany continues to spread, with over 37,000 cases officially admitted. Travel from Berlin to the provinces has been strictly curtailed and public gatherings, particularly in Berlin, Rostock, Potsdam and Frankfurt/Oder have been cancelled.

West German Social Democrat circles have allegedly been informed recently by Yugoslav officials that the Yugoslav regime is interested in improving its relationship with the FRG and to that end is willing to allow its relations with East Berlin to deteriorate. Similar hints to other West German sources were reported last week.

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ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

There is no change in our assessment of Soviet intentions with respect to Berlin negotiations from that presented last week. The additional information on the Sepp Schwab interview tends to confirm the impression that some flexibility in the Soviet negotiating position may be revealed during impending contacts. There are no signs Moscow anticipates an early (and in Western terms, satisfactory) settlement of the Berlin issue, but the USSR evidently believes that, at this stage, a relative normalisation of the atmosphere in and around Berlin serves to promote its objectives in negotiation.

The Schwab interpretation that "recognising the sovereign rights of the GDR" involves only GDR "consent...to an agreement between the four powers" is an apparent softening of the usual GDR demands in this respect. (Ulbricht's most limited definition to date of "respect for GDR sovereignty" -- a theme on which the Soviets have thus far not committed themselves -- required international acceptance of the GDR's present boundaries.) Furthermore, Schwab's indicated acceptance of majority rule in a proposed access authority represents the first public bloc reference to details regarding the operations of the proposed organ. The Soviets have heretofore avoided being drawn into any discussion of such "details."

In line with current Soviet avoidance of new tension-raising activities, there is no evidence the GDR intends to utilize its customs legislation in the near future to harass traffic between the FRG and Berlin. However, the April 9 legal commentary indicates the GDR law envisages West Berlin as part of the GDR customs area, ultimately, if not immediately, and not under FRG customs jurisdiction. As a result, the GDR may be primarily concerned with the principle of the applicability of FRG customs regulation in West Berlin -- where Bonn allegedly "has no business" -- and may direct its major effort in the immediate future toward undermining this aspect of the Bonn-Berlin relationship. Customs requirements for passenger traffic may be the initial target in this respect.

The GDR commentary on air corridor traffic appears to be primarily a statement for the record, reaffirming the GDR legal case, but indicating no intent to push the issue at least for the present.

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